

[James Kerby Ward]

26098

James Kerby Ward

[4515 Shelby?] Street

Jacksonville, Florida

Bus Driver [White?]

Lillian [Stodian?], writer

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Evelyn Werner, Reviser [26?]

JAMES KERBY WARD

After I got off the Ortega bus I walked four blocks that seemed like eight. My warm coat became warmer and heavier as I ploughed through ankle-deep sand.

The Ward home on Shelby street in St. [Johne?] Park, the most carelessly kept of all the houses on the block, had no garden, no lawn and no flowers. [A?] shaggy hedge of evergreen grew in the white sand that surrounded the house.

The cars were parked at the entrance and evidently the cause of the deep ruts in the yard. The porch looked cool and inviting. The large chairs had clean tie-backs and cushions on them; the morning paper was thrown negligently on the couch-swing, and a smoking-stand nearby held a pipe. All around the porch potted plants in cans and tubs bloomed

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vigorously; the [?], a [Christmas Cactus?] in full flower, grew [?] in a white-enameled slop-jar near the front door.

The door was open, and the screen stood ajar. I could see the family in the dining room at their noon meal. Mr. Ward, a small, stout, gray man, came to the door and invited me in.

“Mr. Whitfield told me somebody wanted me to give them a life story or something. Mr. Whitfield's my superintendent. He's a mighty fine feller and a good friend of mine too.’

I seated myself on a green [divan?], and he chose a matching easy chair and started to talk. 2 “Well, to begin with I'm the poorest feller you ever saw about remembering dates and such, my wife 'll have to help out a lot, I imagine.

She's got a heap better mem'ry than me.” He raised his voice a trifle and called to his wife in the dining room, “Come in here, sweetheart, and set down a minute.” Turning to me, he said, “Her [health?] ain't so good and it'll do her good to rest a little, anyway.”

Mrs. Ward, unusually stout and very pale, came in reluctantly.

“Sweetheart, this is Mrs. [had-y'?] say-the-name-was?”

“What did you say you wuz a-sellin,” she asked me. “I'll just tell you we had so much sickness lately that we ain't in no shape to buy [?].” At that point her husband explained, “Mr. Whitfield wants me to give her my life history, and I want you to help me out a little 'cause you know me better than I know myself.

“A Feller's wife usually does know more 'n the man does hisself about his own life. We married a-way back in 1913 and that boy there was the oldest one of the children that was not born here.’ He nodded to his son sitting in the next room at the dining table. ‘He was born at Worthington Springs 21 years ago and we come to Jacksonville when he was a little feller.”

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"You came here in 1918 and you went to work for the [Traction?] Company the next day," Mrs. Ward interposed.

Mr. Ward continued: "A man didn't need no pull or nuthin in them days to get a job. All he had to do was to use his own [face?]. Business was good then and jobs wuz plentiful. But I've seen times change with all kinds of business since then. When times get hard the transportation 3 suffers, 'cause people just don't ride like they do in good times. They get out and walk where they want to go; and then, too, more people have bought cars since I went to work for the company. Believe me we can tell you how good business is all right, 'cause when times pick up people ride a-plenty.

"I been on the job stead ever since I started except when I get off a few days to go up home to fish a little. I got a 100-acre farm at Worthington Springs where I was born. That's not the place where I was really born and raised. I was born at a little town called Lula about 12 miles from Lake City and that's my wife's [home?], too.

"Her [ma and pa?] were friends of my pa and ma. We knew each other all our lives just about, didn't we, sweetheart?"

Mrs. Ward was rocking rhythmically and seemed to be enjoying herself. She smiled proudly and replied, "Yes, but we didn't go together but about [3?] years. [When?] we decided to get married, about all the folks [??] got married, too. We caused a little excitement among the [young?] folks. [You?] see his folks were running a cotton gin and we had a sawmill. [We?] both had big farms and all the kids worked on the farms in them days; even the girls worked some in the fields.

"But we had our good times, too. When we did turn out, we use to go to old barn dances and dance till daylight, work all day the next day, and never think of saying that we were tired. If there was another one anywhere around we would all turn out and go again. We would have our good time for a spell and then settle down to work again and go to bed

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early for a while. We were all healthier then than the present 4 generation ever thought about being. Nowadays you hear young men and girls a-saying that they are tired. [?] I wouldn't think of saying the work myself, and neither would [dad?], would you?"

Mr. Ward smiled at her and said[:?] "I reckon we done right well. We coulda done better though if we hadn't had so much sickness. You know that takes a lot of money for doctors and medicine and for hospitals. I had to have my wife operated on a year or two ago and we are just now a-gettin out of that debt.

"That boy of mine, nodding toward the dining room where the boy sat at the table working a cross-word puzzle, 'has been healthy like me.

It's the wimmen folks that 're always ailing. [William?] there had been real smart. He's been graduated from every school that he ever went to; the [soda-jerking?] school graduated him, too. That 's his diploma a-hanging there on the wall over the plane. He's bought and paid for everything he has had since he was a little feller of 14[;?] so you can see that I ain't proud of him much!

"That 's his car out there, that new Plymouth. He's bought five cars and one motorcycle. I did help him pay for his motorcycle, but all the rest he done by hisself."

At this William rose from the table and came into the room saying: "I wish Dad had another boy to talk about besides me." He was a dark, tall, and quite handsome boy. He tossed the paper into his mother's lap. "Keep this for me, I didn't finish it, but I got to go. Have I got a clean shirt?" He came toward the divan where I was sitting and I noticed for the first time that he was in his stocking feet and his 5 shoes [were?] on the floor beside me. He seemed quite embarrassed at having to retrieve them and explained a little defensively, "I have to rest my feet when I come to lunch." As he walked into his room his mother whispered, "He's so proud I know he felt terrible to be barefooted while you were here."

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Mr. Ward continued, "My two girls are at school. One goes to Lee and is in the 11th grade. She wants to be a business girl and wants a good course that teaches everything. She's smart and anxious to make her own money. That's Geneva. And Pauline's in the ninth grade and her health isn't good. She's got some kind of gland trouble. She ain't just right, somehow, like girls ought to be that's her age. It's the same kind of trouble that her mother had to have a operation about. She says she wants to be a teacher and I am going to send her to college if I have to mortgage the house to send her. It 'll be worth it, I reckon, if she still wants to go by the time she's ready. I always try to give my family what they want.

"One thing I've got that I'm proud of, is good credit. That Coldspot there is paid for, and the washing machine, and the radio, and the piano, and the Chevrolet. I put a new roof on this house, too, since I bought it seven years ago, and we built [two?] two rooms and later William added the little [one?] of his."

Mrs. Ward reminded her husband, "Daddy, you forgot that we had those floors sanded and scraped, and that cost a lot. But we like them like this so much better, makes things look a lot cleaner and I can just throw a rug around here or wherever I want one and it makes the house 6 look a heap better.

"Yes, we spent considerable money on fixin up the place, but I do want the kids to have a nice home to remember after we are dead and gone.

I want the girls and William to bring their friends home and have a good clean time. Now just last night there was a crowd here, a-playing and a-singin. Geneva can't play much but [?]. But they do have a good clean time and I make them some chocolate or tea. I most always try to have a little cake in the house 'cause you never can tell when you gonna have company.

"I want you to see my new range that Mr. Ward bought me the other day. I told him I knowed that he couldn't stay outa debt two weeks and sure nuff he couldn't."

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We walked to the kitchen and she pointed at the stove proudly. "It don't look like a stove a-tall, does it? It looks more like a chest of drawers that belongs in the bedroom. I'm proud of it all right.

"Mr. Ward's been good to get me everything I ever wanted for the house. I try to fix it up nice; I did all the crochet and fancy work you see around here. The girls have so much home-work to do that they don't have time to do things like that, and they think it's a waste of time, anyway, to sit and do it. But you see I got the low blood pressure and heart trouble. I can't do no more 'n I have to, after they come home from school."

"Show her the other rooms, sweetheart, so she can see just how we poor folks live," Mr. Ward suggested. The furniture in the [living?] room was upholstered in [???], [?] soiled. The piano was an old upright with numerous photographs and several old hymnals on it. The electric sewing machine was [?] at the front window and over this was a scarf of [?]. There were more pictures of the family on the machine.

"Now, that's Mr. Ward's pa and ma a-hanging up on the wall. I [?] one of mine, but it's a-needing a frame and I keep it put away in the cedar chest. His pa is a widower and mine is dead but ma is married again. She lives at Lula right on and there she'll stay I reckon. But his pa is a-living in [?]. He's been there about five years, and a-stayin with his oldest daughter. He calls that home."

She turned back to Mr. Ward. He was sound asleep in his chair. "You see," she said maternally, "he usually takes a nap when he comes home for lunch."

At that moment the sound of an automobile horn awakened him. "I get so sleepy every day about this time, if I don't drop off a few minutes, I almost die. That horn means that the ladies that 're a-goin to the funeral with my wife are here. They don't know the man that died; they're just goin to console his sister who's a member of the church we all go to. I don't got to go regular, but the folks go right often. The girls and boy go to [?.?.?], but

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the boy can't go as regular now that he's a-workin where he is. He makes about as much money on his job as I do.

He makes [\$25?] a week and I make [about?] \$30. He works for a package house and of course mines drinks too. He wants to [?] and go on the road as a salesman for some good company. He 9 mentioned it today. He thinks he may go with the [Hygienio Company?]. He's a good talker if I do say so myself. Everybody says I got a mighty good boy. Anyway, he's the best one we ever had.

"When I started working I got 40 cents an hour and we've been paid up to 53 cents, but have been cut down as low as 41 cents. Now we have got [back?] to the [31?] cents. When the time get hard the company has to cut down a little everywhere they can. But they're a mighty good place to work and will treat you right, too.

"I been there since 1918 and I really like driving the [buses?]. I don't have any trouble with anybody. Seems like everbody is about the same. Some people think the conductor [ought?] to make the Negroes get up and give up their seats, but if they got on first and get the seats they are entitled to them. Lots of times I have let people ride for [certain?], if I knew that they didn't have the money and that they rode when they had it. The company tells us when we start to work to use our own judgment about things like that.

"I've had a chance to make a lot of friends in the years that I've been a-drivin. I enjoy my work a lot. So, they never say a word about who a feller votes for. We'd all vote like we wanted to, anyway, no matter if they did say something.

"I've voted the straight Democratic ticket ever since I started and that boy will do the same. I never did try and tell my wife to vote.

She usually votes her own way, anyway. She has friends that discuss the elections and such, and she's a member of the [?.?.?.], who all urged us to vote for the bond issue for the schools, and we did, 10 but some of it we did not vote for. I don't think much about the

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political parties. I just know that I am a old-fashioned Democrat, and don't fly the coop to vote for somebody else just to suit another feller.

"I better get ready to go now. You can ride back with us. The car will be kinda crowded but there's always more room if you try to find it. Anyway, it'll save you that walk even if it is crowded."

Mrs. Ward emerged from her room looking stouter than ever in her homemade royal-blue silk dress. She was heavily powdered and no trace of color was on her face or lips.

"We'd better get started, the funeral starts at 3:30. I do hope they open the coffin. I sure would like to see him. The preacher said that he use to come to the church once in a while and I'd like to see if I remember him."

"Don't you all lock up the doors when you leave like this?" asked one of her friends.

Mrs. Ward laughed, "No, we just push the front door to, and don't bother locking up nothin. There's nothin in my house nobody would want anyway, unless its something to eat, that one thing we do have and plenty of."

I complimented Mrs. Ward on her driving, and she turned immediately to her husband.

"There now, see, you said I couldn't drive good. I never heard anyone compliment you on the way you drive."

"O, well, I'm a good bus driver anyway. My record is the best, or about the best, of any of the drivers. I got a good run now; [Brestwood?] and Main, and that sure is a lot better 'n that [?] section 11 of Riverside Avenue and Day Street.

Mr. Ward left the car to board a bus for the car barn and said to me as he got out, "I hope that story turns out all right, but I never was much of a talker, nohow."